Paine Mountain School District Board of Directors Board Meeting
Wednesday, December 3, 2025 - 6:00 pm
Williamstown Elementary School-Library
Google Meet Option: meet.google.com/aiy-mhhv-spy
(US)+1 440-462-3554 PIN: 318 515 605#

Minutes Approved 12.17.25

1. **Call to Order**
   - **a.** Permission to Record
   - **b.** Roll Call

   Meeting called to order at 6:01pm
   Acting Chair: Jessica Van Deren
   Clerk:Mike Macijeski

   Board Members Present: Jessica Van Deren, Dan Morris, Mike Macijeski, Sarah Path
   Horace Duke, Matt Sullivan, Josh Dobrovich, Will Eberle,
   Danielle Moffatt
   Board Members Absent: none
   Student Board Members:Mariela Swiech - NF
   Absent Student Board Members: David Myer- NF Courtney B - WI Joey Benware - WI

   Administration Present: Matthew Fedders - Superintendent
   Renee Badeau - Director of Curriculum
   Abby Wiggins - Director of School Special Services
   Ermin Milak-Director of Operations

   Principals Present: Denise Russell (NES) Venus Dean (WES)
   Others Present: Danielle Palmer, Dot Higgin, Sarah Franklin, Richard Smith, Eileen Bean,
   Sarah Capron, Sara Comi

2. **Agenda Revision**
   None
3. **Public/Student Participation**
   None
4. **Items for Board Action**
   - **a. Approval of Minutes**
     - 11/19/2025*

     Motion: Approve minutes as written
     Motion Made by: Josh Seconded by: Will
     Motion unanimously carries with one abstention
5. **Reports**
   - **a.** Superintendent's Report*

     Dr. Fedders commented on his written report to the board, available in the board packet for tonight's meeting on www.cvsu.org. He added that the Agency of Education has released its sample cell phone policy for next year, which we will use to craft our district's new cell phone policy.

b. Directors' Reports–nothing tonight

c. Principal's Report*

- WES Principal's Report

Principal Venus Dean took questions about her written report, available in the board packet for tonight's meeting at www.cvsu.org. Sarah asked for more information about supports for students with intensive needs. We have a special educator working with teachers and creating programming for those students, Venus replied. WES uses the I Team, short for interdisciplinary team, a program out of UVM that promotes inclusion in schools. The I Team is bringing in students' families to create wrap-around services. Matt Fedders added that the I Team meets with our administrators, and we pay the I Team through CVSU using a grant that brings in $10,000 in revenue each year.

d. Board Chair –none

6. **New Business**

a. FY27 Budget Preview- Draft #3

Dr. Fedders presented the most recent budget development options to the board. A complete copy is available in the board packet for tonight's meeting at www.cvsu.org.

Anticipated revenue is down, while estimated costs are going up. Negotiations for a new contract are underway with the local union for staff members. Vermont leads all other states in health insurance increases, a major budget driver.

Dr. Fedders presented several charts detailing projected enrollment numbers for Northfield, Williamstown, and the district overall. They range from flat for Northfield to a gradual decline for Williamstown. Jess asked if we can also get enrollment data going back 20 years for reference. Matt F. will work on that. Danielle noted that in 2006 WMHS had 36 graduating seniors. This year it will have 29.

70% of PMSD high school classes do not meet new minimum class size standards required by 2025's Act 73. To address this, we must either reduce staff or reduce the number of class periods in a school day. Dr. Fedders recommended deferring a decision on this till after the state releases its new graduation requirements, which are anticipated soon. He will then work with principals to reduce how many periods each of our high schools offers.

Dan asked if the plan was to reduce class periods effective fall 2026. Yes, Matt F. replied.

Another option is to merge our two middle high schools effective fall 2027, making one a high school and the other a middle school. We might also be able to put everyone on a single campus, but that would require a town vote by the town who would lose their middle high school.

Sarah asked what will happen if we're below minimum class size? There are a range of penalties the state can issue, Matt F. answered.

Will asked Matt for his recommended action. Matt asked to wait and answer after the rest of his presentation, but noted that reducing content area high school teachers would result in each school having only a single teacher each for math, English, and so forth.

Horace stated that the state has pirated funds from the gas tax over time, which is supposed to go to education. He suggested adding 2 cents to the gas tax. Matt F. added that in his opinion we have both spending and revenue problems in funding our schools.

Facilities at NMHS are in need of remediation. Dr. Fedders presented dollar amounts for each project, the largest of which is replacing the HVAC system atop the auditorium, which has not worked in years.

Another possible area of savings would be reducing our preschool program. The state only requires 10 hours of preK per week, but we recently expanded our program to full time. We only get .57 of LTWADM for preschoolers. Full day preK costs a million dollars, of which $211,360 is local money. But Dr. Fedders supports keeping our full day preschool program.

Matt then presented a wide range of budget options reflecting the many possibilities to consider. Complete details including dollar amounts are in the board packet and presentation, available at www.cvsu.org. Dr. Fedders recommended we wait at least a year to merge high schools, since that will involve a lot of work to figure which staff would go where.

The final portion of the presentation focused on the tax impacts of the various budget options. Enrollment is down, and property taxes are up. There will likely be no $118 million buy down from the state like there was last year. We recently learned that PMSD's LTWADM is down 96 students, although other superintendents advised Matt that number might get corrected in our favor. We are looking at a 12% property tax increase without state intervention.

Dr. Fedders noted that residents only pay about 25% of education taxes, with businesses, the state, and other property owners paying the rest. Further, only about 30% of PMSD residents pay the actual tax rate–most qualify for different levels of income-based relief.

After Matt reviewed what will happen to finalize the budget over the next few months, acting chair Jessica invited each board member to ask questions and provide feedback about the budget.

Mariela speculated that if graduation requirements go up and we reduce teachers, we will be in trouble. That's the principals' concern too, said Matt F. We might need more summer school.

Sarah argued that 200K for full time preK is a bargain, and that rushing a merger would be foolish. She asked if we could do the paving work, but not the more expensive HVAC replacement. Sarah favors the budget version that retains current staff and programming. She wants more information on how we are investing our budgeted money at each school site. Horace agreed with Sarah.

Will appreciated hearing all the budget options, thanking Dr. Fedders for his work preparing them. Will emphasized that our schools exist to help students achieve their fullest and best life. He hopes we will increase investment and make our schools attractive to people moving to Vermont. Will wants our district to stay competitive with neighboring schools.

Mike favors keeping full time preK and recommended waiting on nonessential repairs and on merging high schools. Mike sees the need to merge, but feels it would be terrible if we did so only to be forced to do it again a year or two later by the state. It will involve dramatic change, especially for staff. Mike hopes we can make a more informed decision about how best to merge once the state has made things clearer about possible mandatory new school districts.

Jess agreed we should hold off on decisions where we can, and keep full day preK. But our communities can't continue to support tax increases–we must be sensitive to that. Jess hopes we take a larger view on the merger issue. Could we have school choice for high school, or even for K-12? She is tired of waiting for the state to act.

Josh asked a few questions about the condition of the auditorium roof. Matt Fedders explained we have been replacing sections of the roof yearly with money built into the budget. Josh hopes to buy some time before replacing the auditorium HVAC system. Matt F. also clarified that the NMHS parking lot condition is not too bad, and repairs can probably wait.

Josh agreed with Jess about not wanting to wait for the state, but thinks we'll know more in a few months. He's willing to wait that long. Josh likes the school choice option, but doubts the state will allow it. Josh is concerned that we are creating more opportunities, but not creating a better product. Some teachers are not completing their curriculum. We should get kids to proficiency, finish the curriculum–Josh would like to invest in that. Regarding budget options, Josh is between keeping the status quo for staffing and reducing 4 FTEs, and maybe doing the paving.

Danielle considers merging immediately a worst case scenario. She favors no RIFs, but is OK with eliminating one FTE via attrition (one teacher recently announced their retirement). Regarding increasing our class sizes, Danielle's attitude is "Come at me, Vermont"--what will they actually do about it? She thinks we should stay the course, keep our class offerings, and defer maintenance. Half of our budget increase is of the governor's making, she argued. Vermont's recent consolidation efforts have been undermining local representation. Danielle finds that infuriating.

Dan thanked Matt F. for the comprehensive look at different options, adding that we must think both short term and long term. Attrition does not equal a level budget, he maintained. Dan likes the budget options keeping full staff plus maintaining our facilities. He is skeptical about achieving meaningful cost savings by going to one high school and one middle school. Dan would like us to reach out to neighboring districts more intentionally about merger possibilities.

Josh argued that without the governor's 6% infusion last year, we would have seen the same increase. It was a buy down in hopes of a new funding model. Now we are getting all 12% this year. Enrollment is down, but staffing keeps going up.

Sarah thinks there is a December deadline for districts to request school choice. It's not a viable option for us. Sarah asked Josh how we could link investments to student outcomes, and asked Matt F. how he thinks we can improve our current programming. Matt replied that no principal has jumped on that. Matt thinks we lack in some areas–most states have full curriculum programs. We could put a program around ELA into our students' hands for $100-150,000. We also need more social-emotional supports and some facilities improvements. WES kids play in the parking lot. They would love a new playground.

Sarah supports investing in an ELA program. She hates reducing electives for our high schools. There is a loss of time on task between grades 5 and 6–maybe fewer class periods and transitions would be good, especially in middle school. Class size is a problem in high school, not middle school, Dr. Fedders clarified. Middle school already has fewer class periods and fewer transitions than high school.

Dan said we must invest to get good outcomes, not the other way round as Josh described.

Josh countered that we have made a huge investment in iReady, but are not fully utilizing it. He wants us to use it to its full potential. Josh is unhappy that some staff are not using iReady.

Danielle said there are many factors contributing to our youth's struggles, such as the opioid epidemic, two floods, COVID, and social media. Standardized tests are made by for-profit companies, who then sell us products to improve students' scores. We're offsetting societal ills–acting as doctor, counselor, and parents.

Mo observed that the middle schoolers she works with get assigned iReady work. The iReady curriculum is nice and fosters advanced skills. But kids who are assigned iReady don't do the homework to get up to level. The program is well organized–maybe we can target kids who need extra help.

Small classes are common in central Vermont, Mariela continued. We need to know what other schools are going to do with mergers. We have a lot of high school electives, Mo said, but don't have enough core curriculum. For example, she takes physics online, which sucks–it should be a core course. Electives should be exciting, not core material.

Sarah asked how much it will cost to bring back a food backpack for students in need. A little over $5 per backpack, Dr. Fedders replied. Can all our schools have that in the budget, Sarah asked?

In summary, Matt Fedders said it is not pleasant to present potential cuts, but he was confident we would not use most of them. He hears the board saying we shouldn't risk losing current staff with big cuts. We should defer what maintenance we can, and not merge too quickly. We can look at new curriculum products and adding the blue backpack food program. Matt will pare things down to three budget options for the next board meeting. He got the feedback he needs from the board. One decision will be whether to fill the 1 FTE retirement vacancy or not.

Matt S. said he hesitates to lose a teaching position–keeping it would be ideal. Dr. Sullivan suggests we approach the decision with caution.

7. **Public Participation**

   Richard Smith thanked Josh for his common sense budget comments. He asked Dr. Fedders whether there are any cuts to administration in the proposed budget, and if not why not. Matt said he would be in touch with Mr. Smith to provide that information.

8. **Adjournment**

   Meeting Adjourned at 7:50pm
   Motion Made by: Will
   Motion unanimously carries